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Chief Justice Lambert announces continued funding for law school scholarships

Kentucky Legal Education Opportunity Program will continue to support economically disadvantaged law students

FRANKFORT, Ky., May 1, 2006 — Chief Justice Joseph E. Lambert announced today that funding will continue for a scholarship program that benefits law students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The 2003 General Assembly approved the Kentucky Legal Education Opportunity (KLEO) Program to provide \$5,000 scholarships for each of the three years of law school to university-selected students. Up to 15 scholarships per year are available to each of Kentucky's three public law schools.

KLEO appeared to be in jeopardy when preliminary examination of House Bill 382, the Judicial Branch budget bill, suggested that the program had been discontinued by the 2006 General Assembly. "The media reported the program had been terminated and this view was generally accepted by many, albeit with disappointment," said Chief Justice Lambert. "I withheld comment on the future of the program until I could interpret the Judicial Branch budget bill, a duty imposed upon me by law, and consult with budget staff and legal counsel."

Chief Justice Lambert said that after careful consideration he came to the following conclusions:

The 2003 General Assembly created the KLEO Program within House Bill 294, the 2002-2004 Judicial Branch budget bill, at the funding level of \$125,000 for FY 2003 and \$200,000 for FY 2004. The 2004 General Assembly continued funding for KLEO within House Bill 396, the 2004-2006 Judicial Branch budget bill, at an increased amount of \$225,000 a year for FY 2005 and FY 2006.

In the 2006 Judicial Branch budget request, the Budget Office of the Administrative Office of the Courts determined that increased funding for KLEO was not required, and because continued funding for KLEO was already included within base funding, a specific line-item request was not necessary.

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"After careful review of the enacted budget," said Chief Justice Lambert, "it was clear that the funding level for the KLEO program was not eliminated or reduced in the Judicial Branch's appropriation, nor was there language that eliminated the program. Because the enacted budget funded KLEO, the program will continue at the current level."

"When I try to put the significance of this program into perspective, I simply imagine what our classrooms and courtrooms would look like without our extraordinary KLEO students," said Allison Connelly, associate professor and Legal Clinic director for the University of Kentucky College of Law who also coordinates the KLEO program statewide. "They wouldn't mirror the diverse society we live in or match our deeper vision of a system of justice in which money doesn't matter. As the students say, 'KLEO is changing the face of justice in Kentucky.'"

Chief Justice Lambert said he worked to promote the initial legislation creating KLEO after he discovered there were fewer than 200 African-American lawyers out of the approximately 13,000 licensed attorneys in Kentucky, and that many qualified aspiring lawyers of all races lack the financial resources to attend law school. "KLEO's goal is to make Kentucky courtrooms more representative of Kentucky citizens, with individuals of all races and economic backgrounds serving as attorneys, judges and prosecutors statewide and as legal counsel in all branches of state government," he said.

Kentucky's three public law schools are the University of Kentucky College of Law in Lexington, the University of Louisville Louis D. Brandeis School of Law in Louisville and the Northern Kentucky University Salmon P. Chase College of Law in Highland Heights.

The Chief Justice of Kentucky is the executive head of the Court of Justice. Chief Justice Lambert was elected in April 2006 to a third four-year term as Chief Justice by the justices of the Supreme Court.

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